CHANGING PROFILE OF MEERUT UNDER GLOBALIZATION: AN

ANALYTICAL STUDY ON CONSUMERISM

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ABSTRACT

Lifestyle is the most prominent indicator of the changing consumerism pattern in a society. Through the lifestyle, the society reciprocates about the choices, views, interests, needs, wants, values and income distribution of its members. With the upsurge of the consumer culture in the Indian market, the society has been witnessing a behavioral transformation in the middle class. This affluent class freely exerts their choices through their consumption, being the centre of consumption and the main receiver of the effects of liberalization. The changing liberal economy of India has given unparalleled disposable income into the hands of the common man steadily propelling them towards consumerism as a means to achieve better quality of life. The present study is an attempt to study the impact of globalization on consumerism in Meerut through the chosen demographic and socio-economic variables. The study tries to comprehend the truth behind the rising consumerism amongst the urban middle class of India, with special reference to Meerut.

KEYWORDS : *Lifestyle, Consumerism, Liberalization, Globalization, Consumption Pattern*

Original Article

INTRODUCTION

Situated between Ganga and Yamuna and having close proximity to New Delhi, Meerut is a part of National Capital Region (NCR) and one of the largest cities of Uttar Pradesh. It is the fastest growing city in NCR in terms of educational facilities, infrastructural development, commercial, agricultural, industrial growth, medical and health facilities, social activities and as a hub of real estate business. The rising importance of the city compels us to look back into the developments that have taken place in the region since the earliest. The history of Meerut can be traced back to the great epic era of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Meerut finds mention in the Mahabharata (3139 BC) as "Meyrashtra" – as the city of in-laws of the Demon King 'Ravana'. Once Meerut was also a centre of Buddhism during the regime of the Great Ashoka'. The city leapt into international prominence because of war of Independence in 1857, when on April 24, 1857, eighty five troops out of ninety of the third cavalry refused to touch the cartridges resulting into court martial and were sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. This marked the beginning of a general movement of freedom from the British rule, with the support of civil populace. The socio- religious reform movement of the 19th century moulded the social orientation of the English educated middle class. Great reformers and social architects like Dayanand Saraswati, Annie Besant, Swami Vivekananda, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott and Syed Ahmed Khan visited Meerut, creating an impounded effect on the minds of the local residents.

In its course of development, Meerut has tried to maintain a balance between traditional ways and modernization, and has been successful in weaving the seeds of modernity within the scaffold of its traditional

framework. This has not been a smooth sail, as there were clashes and disagreements which worked as the harbinger of the new social and economic evolution. Today, Meerut is the home to some of the globally famed industries like sports goods, jewelry, scissors, auto-parts, auto-tyres, handlooms, power looms, pesticides and sweet-meats. The rise of middle class in India can be dated back to the British era, prologue to which was the introduction of English education. Meerut also specifically came under the influence of this modern English education system, being an important centre of the British administration and thus the emergence of middle class in the region. Although the seeds of its progress were sown in the colonial era, augmentation of the middle class proceeded gradually post independence of the country. The rapid development coupled with the upsurge of urbanization and globalization, proved to be the driving engines for rise of middle class. The social segment which has been affected most by the global emerging market was the progressing urban middle class, incorporating professionals.

Consumption is therefore regarded as one of the prominent variable of middle class and middle class consumers as the principal beneficiary of consumerism. The 'temples' of modern India, i.e the industries, as coined by Late Jawaharlal Nehru, indicated the State-sponsored modernization gave birth to a new emerging white-collared professional class or the middle class. This new class, either by design or default has given birth to a generation of individuals who have unprecedented disposable income or the power to spend. The consumerism has slowly and gradually infiltrated the society, reflecting in the shopping activities of consumers. This picture of the 'New' Indian middle class is established upon the introduction of novel tastes and new standard of living; which very well corresponds to the global picture of consumerism.

The standard of living of a family unit (a group of individuals who live together and take their meals collectively from the same kitchen) can be perceived from the pattern of their consumption, and the consumption budget which ultimately point towards the level of welfare of the family. Likewise, the food consumption pattern of a family is dependent on many factors viz. education of members, family assets, income, occupation, and demographic specifications and thus it is a significant parameter of welfare and wellbeing of any individual or family. Lifestyle is a broader term which is used to depict the way an individual, family and society exist. It reverberates the attitude, mind sets, interests, actions, behaviors, values and distribution of income. It also reflects the expression of self-image which is mitigated through the usage of various kinds of goods and services. The changes in the consumer taste, brand preference, income are all manifested through a shift in the consumption pattern of the consumers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher designed convenience random sampling for designing a structured questionnaire based on nominal scale. A total of 276 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents of Meerut city to collect the primary data. The study was conducted in two market areas: the shopping malls and major markets in Meerut (Sadar bazaar and Budhana gate). The respondents completed the questionnaire at the purchasing time with anonymity. 250 questionnaires which were complete were selected out for further study, out of which 53% were males and 47% females. The responses were further tabulated to infer the useful results as per the objectives of the study. The correlations of the socio economic variables were tested using chi-square (χ^2) test.

Objectives and Hypothesis

The present study was undertaken with the twin objectivesen compassing a detailed quantitative study and a secondary qualitative study. The quantitative study was directed to evaluate the influence of the socio economic factors on lifestyle and consumerism, and at the same time to explore the adoption of brand preference among the respondents. In the hindsight, the study also has a subsidiary qualitative objective to evaluate the evolution of Meerut city to its present day developed form. In the light of the pre-defined objectives, the following hypothesis was formulated and tested.

**H_0:** The consumer preference for branded clothes is independent of the family income.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Quantitative Study

Profile of the Respondents

While undertaking the fieldwork, specific focus was kept to proportionally represent people of various segments viz. professionals, Government employees, teachers, businessmen etc. The graphical representation for the distribution of the various demographic variables in terms of their respective percentages are shown as pie charts (Figure 1 to 3).
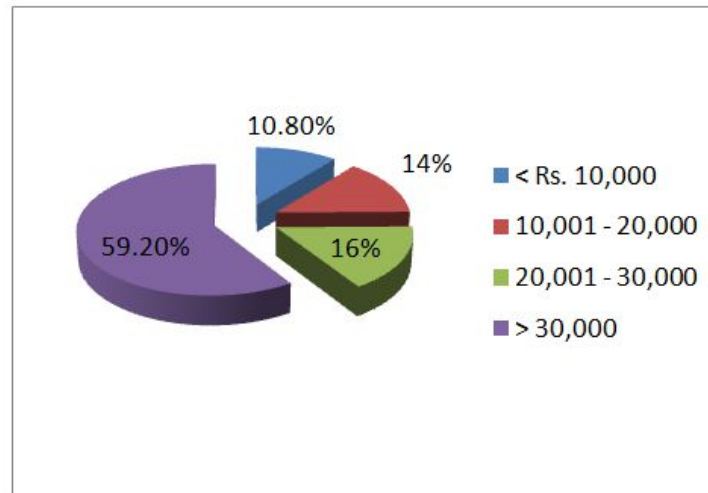
Figure 1: Gender Distribution
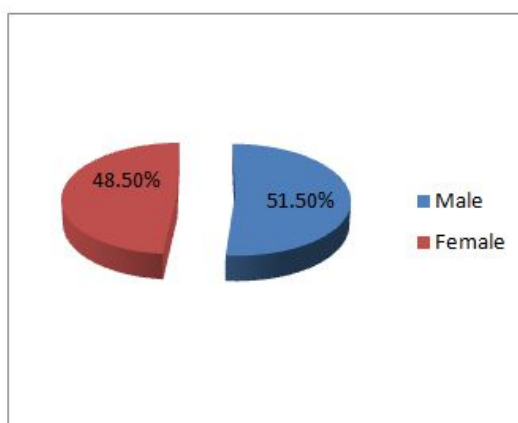
(Source: Primary Data)

Figure 2: Occupational Background
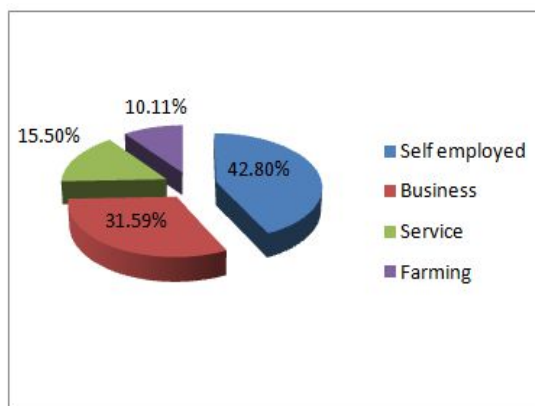
(Source: Primary Data)

Figure 3: Monthly Family Income

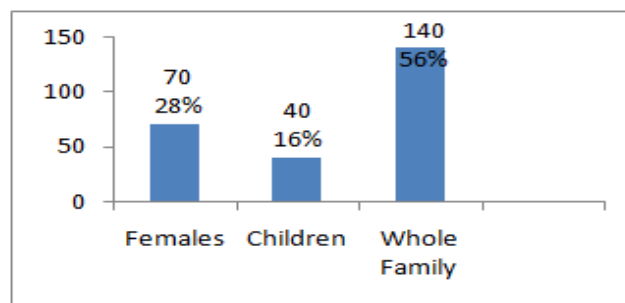(**Source:** Primary Data)

Food Consumption Pattern

The consumption pattern for the food articles have been examined in the light of motivating factors influencing food purchase, role of family members in deciding the purchase of specific food articles, expenses on the non-necessary fancy food articles, consumption of fast-food articles and frequency of eating out in hotel/ restaurant. In the current times, an enormous shift can be observed skewed in favour of consuming more fruits, bakery products and 'convenience food' i.e. increasing 'fast-food culture' due to changing commercial practice and changing lifestyle in the country.

**Figure 4: Factors Motivating the Purchase of Food Articles**
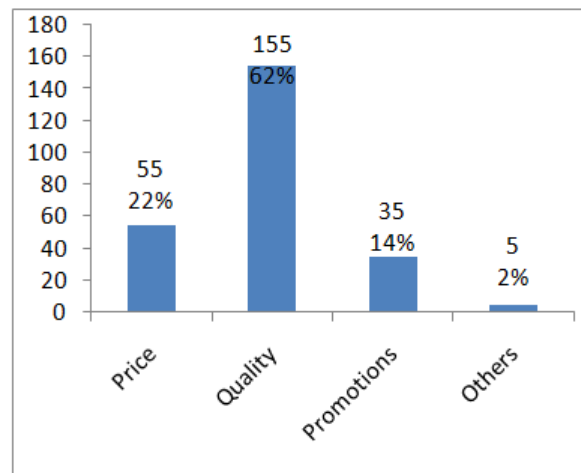
(**Source:** Primary Data)

The results (figure 4) disclosed that majority of respondents (62%) identified quality of the food article as the major factor motivating the buying behavior, followed by price (22%), while promotional campaign have a little influence over the buying behavior.

Figure 5: Role of Family Members in Decision Making for Purchase of Food Articles
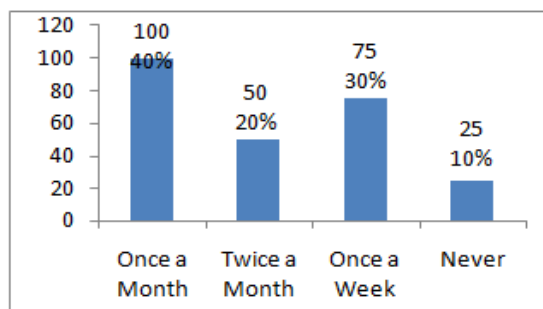

(**Source:** Primary data)

The results (figure 5) revealed that the consumption and purchase of food articles is not a single-handed decision of any one family member, but the whole family as a unit decides the same (56%). This is followed by the females (28%),which makes sense as they are the ones who handle the kitchen and the diet of other family members. On the other hand, the children contribute 16% to the said decision.

Figure 6: Consumption Pattern of Fast-Food
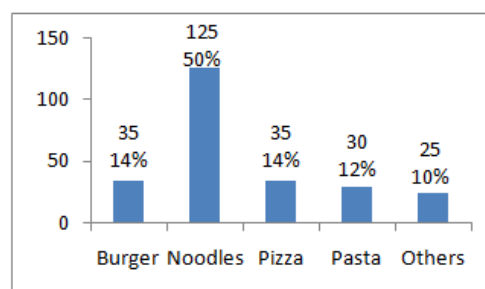
(**Source:** Primary data)

It is evident from figure 6 that among the various fast-food items, noodles is the most favourite (50%), while burger, pizza and pasta show comparable results (14%, 14% and 12% respectively). Maggie (marketed by Nestle foods) which is the most popular noodle brand, has evolved to suit the spicy taste buds of the Indian consumers by developing suitable variants to remain ahead in the race. Maggie is being closely followed by other popular brands like Chings, Yipme and others who keep on upgrading their variants according to the taste preference of the Indian consumers.

Figure 7: Eating out in Restaurant

(**Source:** Primary data)

As exhibited from the results (figure 7), majority of respondents (40%) enjoy to eat out at restaurant once a month with their family, followed by respondents who go out once a week (30%) and those who eat out twice a month trail behind them with 20%.

It can be clearly inferred from the data analyzed for studying the food consumption pattern (figures 4-7), that people are becoming increasingly aware of the various brands and escalating quality consciousness is also affecting the purchase of various food articles. Various forms of media, corporate and government-led authorities and departments are playing considerable roles in creating ample amount consumer awareness in the population. All these together are responsible for the changing attitude of consumers which in ultimately result in changing consumption patterns. The focus today is on convenience of consumption and time-saving alternatives. The role of women in family is reinforced by the results of the study pertaining to their role as a decision-maker for purchasing various food articles. Also eating out at restaurants and hotels is trending up among the respondents (90%).

Fashion Involvement and Buying Behavior

Fashion is moving through the diverse socio-economic classes of the society as the disposable income at hand is increasing and also because we are trying to emulate the global fashion trends thanks to our exposure to world media. The fashion distribution trend spanning across the socio-economic levels are being described below.

It was found that while the major portion of respondents (60%) shows their preference towards the branded clothes, still there is the other 40% who are not bothered about the brand of clothes and are happy with locally stitched or procured garments. If we delve further into the results, we can better study the preference for brands separately in the various segments of the society by dividing the responses of the respondents based on their family income. The same is depicted in detail in table 1 given below. Note: The values of degrees of freedom and level of significance are 3 and 5% for calculation of chi-square (χ^2) value.

**Table 1: Preference for Branded Clothes A Cross Various Income Groups**

Family Income	Yes	No	Total	Chi-Square Value (χ^2)
Less than Rs. 10000	2 7.41% (16.2)	25 92.59% (10.8)	27	
Between Rs. 10001 to Rs.20000	16 45.71% (21)	19 54.29%(14)	35	
Between Rs. 20001 to Rs. 30000	16 40% (24)	24 60% (16)	40	61.59
Above Rs. 30000	116 78.38% (88.8)	32 21.62% (59.2)	148	
Total	**150**	**100**	**250**	

It is clear from table 1 that major portion of the respondents (78.38%) among those with family income greater than Rs. 30,000 showed their preference towards buying branded clothes. I n comparison, this preference towards choosing branded options is not very prevalent among other classes having lesser family income.

The proposed hypothesis (H$_0$) was tested by performing Chi square (χ^2) test for the above data (table 1) at 5% significance level. The calculated value of χ^2 is **61.59**, which is found to be significant. Hence, in conclusion the Null hypothesis (H$_0$) is being rejected in favor of the Alternate hypothesis which states: **"The consumer preference for branded clothes is idependent of the family income".**

The results depicting the trend of using artificial imitation jewellery among women are shown in figure 8. The results reveal that 80% women wear imitation jewellery at some time, while the remaining 20% do not ever wear it. While the former represent the new-age evolved women who want to keep up with the current trends by adopting the latest fashion styles, the latter is the representative of still tradition bound segment who is not bothered by what is going on in the fashion circuit and consider it unworthy to wear imitation jewellery.

Figure 8: Artificial Imitated Jewellery Trend Among Women
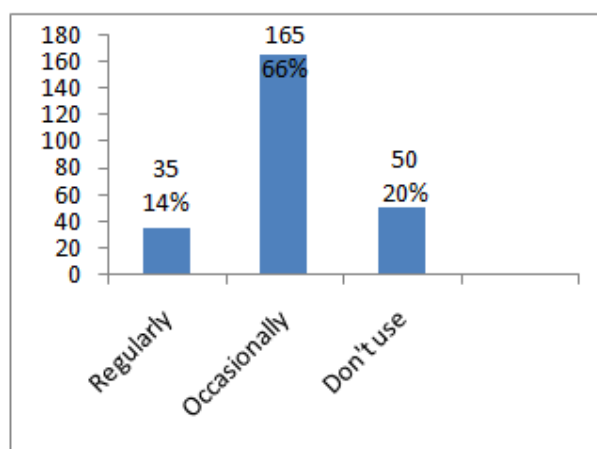
(**Source:** Primary data)

Qualitative Study: Evolution of Meerut City In to Its Present form

The city of Meerut, which has once been an observer and witness to the upsurge and decline of the British Empire in India, has endorsed an endless history of its own. The city which was once dominated by agricultural families has gradually seen the shift of the city boundaries and expansion of the urban area, thus changing the image of the city. During the process, the city has fluctuated between stages of growth and quiescence. Due to its strategic location advantages there are plenty of signs of "Potential for Urbanisation", and overall future development opportunities. The infrastructures segment of Meerut is currently going through a boom face with many new projects relating to real estate, shopping malls, and entertainment, rail and road connectivity etc. There are more than 90 real estate developers working on the different real estate projects worth Rs.900 cr.

Table 2: Malls in Meerut

S. No	Name of the Mall	Year of establishment	Location
1	PVS Mall	2004	Shastri Nagar
2	The Rap Magnum Mall/GG Mall	2005	Delhi Road
3	Melange Mall	2007	Roorkee Road
4	Era Mall	2008	Delhi Road
5	Shopprix Mall	2014	Hapur By-Pass

The mall culture started in Meerut in the year 2004 with the establishment of the first mall in the city, PVS Mall. Inspite of the start being in 2004, a total of five malls have come up in the city in the span of a decade (Table 2). An interesting thing to note here is that the location of these malls is such that it is seals all the entry/exit points to the city, such that accessibility to shop at the malls is available to consumers all through the city.

Meerut is famous as an industrial city. It is also famous for Handloom work and Scissors Industry from olden age. Being in the proximity of Delhi, it is ideal for industries like textile, transformers, sugar, distillery, chemicals, engineering, paper, sports goods and jewellery. Meerut is the largest suppliers of Sports Goods being the largest Indian Cricket Goods manufacturer and exporter.

Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Corporation (UPSIDC) has already two industrial estates in Meerut namely Partapur and Uddyogpuram. Mohakampur Industrial Area is a private initiative. Bhurbaral Industrial Area is under development. Another Industrial Area has been identified by UPSIDC at Gagol Road adjacent to Delhi Road for which 1200 hectares of land is available for industrial development.

Identified industrial areas are at Shatabdinagar, Delhi Road, Bagpat Road, Roorki Road, Mawana Road, Parikshitgarh Road, Garh Road and Hapur Road. Further 2000 hectares land is being proposed for Industrial development near Delhi-Meerut Express way. NIPRO GLASS from Japan has set up a large glass plant for medical use.

According to new industrial policy of government of India, District Industries Centre (DIC) was established in 1979 in Meerut district to speedup industrial development. The main objective of DIC is to provide all the services under a single roof. A general manager, who is assisted by seven managers-in-charge and other employees of various functions, heads each DIC.

There are 55 units in the district those come under large and medium scale industries, with the investment of Rs. 330.22 crore and provide employment to 28922 people. These are located in the areas like Delhi Road, Kankarkhera, Sadar Bazar, Modipuram, Daurala, Mawana, Partapur and Baghpat Road etc. These industries produce Alcohol, Straw Boards, Transformers, Tyre-tubes, Cotton Yarn, Sugar, Chemicals, Milk Products, Paper etc. Besides the above there are 21702 Small Scale Units working at Meerut with the investment of Rs. 435.15 crore providing employment to 108285 people. These industries are producing Electrical Equipments, Flour, Suji, Eatable Items, Sports Goods, Electronic Items, Engineering Items etc. Further, in these industries of Meerut district, some expert handsare also engaged in the work of Scissors, Hasthkargha, Range and Chaplain, Musical Instruments etc.

CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary society in India is marked by growing importance of consumer culture, fuelled by the rise of disposable income in the hands of consumers of all segments and increasing availability of commodities in the open market. The phenomenon of the world wide rising trend of consumerism is also well evident in Meerut. The rapid rise in consumerism of the area is a result of combination of factors related to economy, technological penetration, agriculture, social advancements, aspirations of consumers at every income level and willingness to spend more and more among rural and urban consumers of the area under study.

The luxury goods are posting strong growth rate. The rich consumer base in the city is indulging in luxury goods (like fast food, eating at restaurant and branded clothes) for both style and status reasons. Changing lifestyle trends among consumers is helping to drive the groth of such goods and changing the whole pattern of consumerism. With the opening of

malls, consumers prefer to visit these shopping malls as they relish the overall premium experience of shopping there.

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